

# PROFILE 2005 A LETTER FROM HOME



THE MERIDIAN STAR

HEALTH & MEDICAL

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## Nursing student, citizen soldier

*James E. Davis is a sophomore at East Mississippi Community College. He is studying secondary education because, he explains, “teachers are the backbone of our society.”*

*“I believe in education. I know that our youth are our most important resource,” James said. “Our youth are our future, and we must be there to teach them and guide them. No matter what you do in life, you must have a teacher.”*

*A military veteran himself, James wrote about 22-year-old Carla Dionne Mayberry, a staff sergeant with the Mississippi Air National Guard’s 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron at Key Field in Meridian.*



Davis

*In this time of the citizen soldier, it is not surprising to learn that Carla is also a pre-nursing major at EMCC.*

*“I chose Carla because she has served in the Middle East twice,” James said. “We met in our business statistics class. I liked the idea that she had served her country and was still trying to further her education.”*

**By James E. Davis**

special to The Star

Carla Dionne Mayberry has been called to active duty twice since joining the Mississippi Air National Guard in 2000.

Since that time, she has been trying to complete a degree at East Mississippi Community College, but her service to her country has made her progress slow.

“I have enrolled in my last semester at EMCC, and I will finally graduate in May 2005,” Mayberry said.

Mayberry originally enrolled at EMCC in the fall of 2000, but she interrupted her education to join the Mississippi Air National Guard. She said she joined for the educational benefits.

She went through basic training in San Antonio, Texas, from January to March 2001. From March to June 2001, she trained to be a radar air traffic controller in Biloxi. After that, she returned to Meridian to begin on-the-job training, which lasted 14 months.

Once fully rated as a radar air traffic controller, with the rank of senior airman, she registered late for the fall 2002 semester.

### Afghanistan, then Iraq

Mayberry was able to complete only one semester because she was called up to serve a three-month, peacetime tour in Bagram, Afghanistan. Her job was helping supply planes land in the desert.

Desert life was a little difficult, but Mayberry said she had few complaints.

There were washers and dryers, transportation, showers and, eventually, they got real bathrooms. Mayberry’s mission was successful; her unit was relieved in April 2003 and its members returned home safely.

In August 2003, Mayberry once again enrolled for another semester at EMCC and, once again, she was only able to complete one semester.

In January 2004, she went to Knoxville, Tenn., for six weeks at the Airman Leadership School. While she was there, she received orders for another Middle Eastern tour, this time to Northern Iraq from April to August 2004.

Mayberry recalls temperatures as high as 124 degrees. Along with their

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PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

### ‘THAT’S WHAT I SIGNED UP TO DO’

Staff Sgt. Carla Dionne Mayberry of the 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron has put her nursing classes on hold twice to serve in the Middle East — once in Afghanistan and once in Iraq. She said her tour in Iraq was one of the worst experiences of her life: “But, I realized that this was my job and that’s what I had signed up to do. This experience was one I don’t want to, and hopefully won’t have to, go through again. I’ll never forget it.”



PHOTO BY STEVE GILLESPIE / THE MERIDIAN STAR

### AIR DEFENSE

Staff Sgt. Jeff Sibley of Newton, left, and Sgt. 1st Class Allen Amis, standing, members of the 1st Battalion, 204th Air Defense Artillery of the Mississippi Army National Guard, demonstrate the capabilities of the “Avenger” Air Defense Missile System at the unit’s headquarters in Newton.

## 1-204th ADA: Experts in the ‘Avenger’ missile

By **Steve Gillespie**  
staff writer

The 1st Battalion, 204th Air Defense Artillery, is headquartered in Newton.

The mission of the 204th ADA is to provide air defense against low-altitude aircraft. The battalion uses the “Avenger” Air Defense Missile System — and was the first Army National Guard unit to receive the state-of-the-art defense weaponry.

The air defense unit was organized on May 21, 1942, as the U.S. Army’s 2nd Battalion, 609th Coast Artillery, or anti-aircraft battalion. After several other redesignations, the unit was sent to Europe as the 204th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, landing in England in March 1944.

The unit participated in the defense of England against German air assaults. On June 19, 1944, the unit was part of the Nor-

mandy, Northern France, Rhineland and Central European campaigns before the end of World War II.

The 204th was deactivated in November 1945 at Camp Shanks, New York. The unit was allotted to the Mississippi Army National Guard in April 1951 with headquarters in Vicksburg; the headquarters was relocated to Laurel later that year.

In 1959, elements of the battalion were redesignated as other units in the Mississippi National Guard.

On Oct. 14, 1995, the 4th Battalion, 114th Field Artillery formally accepted the Avenger Air Defense System. The battalion was then redesignated as the 1st Battalion, 204th ADA.

The 1st Battalion, 204th Air Defense Artillery, now headquartered in Newton, also has units in Bay Springs, Forest, Morton and Decatur.